



COLORADO
Governor Jared Polis



Governor Polis and the Colorado Department of Higher Education Celebrate First Graduates of CORE Initiative

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DENVER - Today, Governor Polis and The Colorado Department of Higher Education celebrated the first 300 graduates who received diplomas through the Colorado Re-Engaged (CORE) Initiative. Created on June 29, 2021, when Governor Polis signed bipartisan House Bill 21-1330, [High Education Student Success](#), sponsored by Representatives Julie McCluskie, and Naquetta Ricks, and Senators Rachel Zenzinger and Barbara Kirkmeyer, CORE enables four-year higher education institutions in Colorado to award associate degrees to students who stepped away before earning a bachelor's degree after earning at least 70 credit hours.

“CORE is a great opportunity for Coloradans to get a degree and advance their careers. So many Coloradans who are forced by their circumstances to step away from education, have invested so much time and money, yet don't have the degree to reflect their hard work. I am proud that Colorado is providing students and institutions with the tools they need to help Coloradans get degrees and fill in-demand, good-paying jobs,” said Governor Polis.

CORE applies to students who left their degree up to 10 years before the current semester. To support four-year institutions in implementing CORE, Governor Polis and the Colorado legislature appropriated \$1 million in funding from the federal American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA).

“It is vital that students get credit for the work they have done post-high school,” said CDHE Executive Director Dr. Angie Paccione. **“Each degree and certificate are a stepping stone to a better career, a better future, and a better**

life. We're thankful to the legislature, governor, and our participating colleges and universities for helping these individuals reach their goals."

More than 25,000 Coloradans may currently be eligible for an associate degree under CORE, with several thousand more becoming eligible each year. By offering qualifying students an earned associate degree for credits already completed, institutions participating in CORE can:

- Enable degree recipients to obtain higher-paying jobs and more secure employment, which improves economic prospects for these former students and their communities.
- Increase the number of Coloradans with academic credentials and degrees, which strengthens the state's workforce and supports the economic recovery of the business community.
- Better position degree recipients to return to higher education to complete a bachelor's degree or higher.

There are currently seven institutions participating in the CORE Initiative:

- Colorado State University-Fort Collins
- Colorado State University-Pueblo
- Fort Lewis College
- Metropolitan State University of Denver
- University of Northern Colorado
- University of Colorado Colorado Springs
- University of Colorado Denver
- Western Colorado University, joining in 2024

"Sometimes life gets in the way of education plans, but students who have earned their academic credits should be recognized with a degree that will advance their careers," said Speaker Julie McCluskie, D-Dillon, sponsor of the legislation. **"I congratulate the first round of graduates to receive their degree through the CORE initiative. They are now one step closer to a stronger future for themselves and their families. Through legislation we passed, we're making it possible for Coloradans to earn their higher education degrees and get a jumpstart on the career of their dreams."**

"The COVID-19 pandemic altered lives in all four corners of the state. This is in part why it was so critical to create a program where Coloradans may be

awarded a postsecondary credential for the credits they already earned,” said Senator Barbara Kirkmeyer, sponsor of the legislation. **“In receiving their degrees, we hope these individuals will have the confidence and skills to fill Colorado's in-demand jobs, earn a livable wage, and realize their career and educational goals.”**

“I am thrilled to see that students are already benefiting from the CORE program and receiving formal recognition for work they have invested,” said Senator Rachel Zenzinger, sponsor of the legislation. **“The COVID pandemic devastated Colorado; but we derived a sliver of good in the form of associate degrees for people who would otherwise have nothing.”**

“Nearly 75% of jobs in Colorado require some sort of postsecondary credential or degree, making the passage of this bill a key step in increasing Coloradans' earning potential,” said Representative Naquetta Ricks, sponsor of the legislation. **“Our hope is that earning one encourages not only upwards economic mobility for these individuals, but also, gives them further motivation to earn a bachelor's and continue pursuing their postsecondary goals.”**

On December 5, 2023, the University of Colorado Denver held an inaugural convocation ceremony to award the first associate degrees in the state under CORE. Chancellor Michelle Marks and CDHE Executive Director Dr. Angie Paccione presented degrees to graduates. Of the 147 eligible students, 69 opted in to receive an associate of general studies degree in fall 2023.

Ayiela, a UCD student receiving an associate degree on Dec. 5 said, **“It was mentioned at the ceremony that other colleges may follow our lead with this initiative. I 1000% agree that they should and believe that sharing my voice will help make that happen. This ceremony wasn't just about getting a degree, it was about healing, self-love and triumph over hardship.”**

“The initiative is doing what it was designed to do. It's putting credentials in the hands of former students,” said Shaun Schafer, associate vice president of Curriculum, Academic Effectiveness and Policy Development and professor at Metropolitan State University of Denver. **“We've had many students asking about returning to the university and a handful of other former students checking to see if they are eligible.”**

“Receiving the earned associate of general studies degree is a major milestone for our former CU Denver students who stopped out of college due to life circumstances without completing the bachelor's degree they were pursuing,” said Beth Myers, associate vice chancellor for Academic Planning and Institutional Effectiveness at the University of Colorado Denver. **“I heard one graduate tell her mother, that her coursework wasn't for nothing; it was worth the investment. We look forward to seeing how the acknowledgment of their learning impacts their longer-term career opportunities.”**

For more information on the CORE Initiative visit the [CDHE website](#).

About the Colorado Department of Higher Education
Working with the Colorado Commission on Higher Education, we support students, advocate and develop policies to maximize higher education opportunities for all. The Department believes every Coloradan should have an education beyond high school to pursue their dreams and improve our communities. Read the strategic plan, [Building Skills in an Evolving Economy](#).

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Contact Governor Polis

State Capitol Bldg - 200 E. Colfax Ave., Rm. 136, Denver, CO 80203

Constituent Services Help Line: (303) 866-2885

Governor's Office, Front Desk: (303) 866-2471

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